

Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554

CC: 96-45

In the Matter of)
Petition for Waiver Filed by)
Central Texas Telephone Cooperative, Inc.)
Concerning the Definition of "Study Area" Contained in the)
Part 36 Appendix-Glossary of the Commission's Rules)

AAD 95-139

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To: Chief, Common Carrier Bureau

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

**REQUEST FOR REMOVAL OF WAIVER CONDITION
CONSISTENT WITH COMMISSION POLICY**

Central Texas Telephone Cooperative, Inc. ("Central Texas") submits this request for the removal of the "cap" on the Universal Service Fund ("USF") cost allocation support payments established by the Commission's Order adopted April 1, 1996, with respect to Central Texas's study area.¹ The Order authorized the transfer of local exchange facilities consisting of two exchanges serving 2,181 access lines into Central Texas's existing study area. As a condition to the grant of study area waiver, the Order imposed a limitation or "cap" on USF disbursements to the Central Texas study area of \$2,044,066 per annum. Consistent with the overarching Commission policy conclusions now established by the Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration, released September 9, 1999,² Central Texas requests that its individual USF cap be removed as of January 1, 2000.³

¹ Memorandum Opinion and Order, AAD 95-139, 11 FCC Rcd 11477 (1996) ("Order").

² Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration, AAD 93-93, 95-72, 95-30, 97-21, 97-23, 97-117, 98-44, 98-53, DA 99-1845, released September 9, 1999 ("Cap Removal Order").

³ Although this Request references an effective date of January 1, 2000, Central Texas does not waive its right to raise issues in the future with respect to the applicability of the

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Central Texas expects that many other similarly-situated companies will be seeking removal of their individual USF caps consistent with the Bureau's newly articulated policy conclusions. In order to avoid the administrative burden of repeatedly applying its new policy to a multitude of almost identical requests, Central Texas respectfully suggests that the Commission simply clarify, on its own motion, its policy by lifting the 57 remaining USF caps.

In the absence of this clarification, Central Texas respectfully requests expedited action in light of the consistency of this request with the recent policy conclusions and to accommodate the completion of the USF administration prior to January 1, 2000. In support thereof, Central Texas submits the following:

I. Background

On September 20, 1995, Central Texas and six other companies filed a joint petition for waiver of the frozen study area boundaries. On April 2, 1996, the FCC released its Order authorizing the removal of exchanges from the Contel and GTE Texas study areas and allowing Central Texas and the other six companies to consolidate their acquired exchanges within their respective existing Texas study areas. Central Texas was authorized to transfer two exchanges serving 2,181 access lines into its existing study area subject to the condition that, absent explicit approval from the Bureau, the annual USF support provided to the existing study area would not exceed the estimated post-upgrade amount of \$2,044,066, specified in the joint petition.⁴ The National Exchange Carrier Association ("NECA") was ordered not to distribute USF payments

Commission's policy or rules to prior periods beginning May 8, 1997.

⁴ Order at ¶ 20.

exceeding the limitation.

In the Order, the Bureau also acknowledged appropriately that

new USF rules, implementing new statutory mandates, are likely to alter the distribution of USF support to high-cost areas and require us to revisit these issues following implementation of the 1996 Act.⁵

Although Central Texas was aware in 1995 that the facilities to be purchased were substandard, and that the Bureau would likely impose a limit on USF recovery, Central Texas, nevertheless, fully expected that a rational network cost recovery application would be ultimately resolved consistent with the public interest.⁶ Central Texas believed that rational cost recovery would be possible by removal of the limit or the implementation of a new USF plan, under which the reasonable high costs would be addressed. The Central Texas study area's 2000 USF receipts, based on data forwarded from the Universal Service Administrative Corporation ("USAC") to the Commission on October 1, 1999, would be \$2,850,998.95. Grant of this request will allow Central Texas to recover fully the USF payments related to the costs incurred in providing service to rural Texas.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Since purchasing the San Saba and Richland Springs exchanges from GTE in 1996, Central Texas has invested heavily to upgrade the infrastructure of the two exchanges. The upgrades include new digital switches at both locations, construction of a new local business office in San Saba, the installation of fiber optic facilities to replace an antiquated microwave system and the implementation of equal access in both exchanges.

II. Removal of Central Texas's Cap is Consistent with Established Commission Policy

On September 9, 1999, the Commission issued its Cap Removal Order, addressing petitions for waiver and reconsideration of the USF conditions applied to 32 study areas. While the Commission noted its policy of monitoring USF impact on carriers involved in study area changes and capping carriers at some estimate of post-upgrade costs, the Commission correctly concluded that limiting the duration of those caps is appropriate and in the public interest.⁷ Accordingly, the Commission granted petitioners' requests to lift the individual caps placed on their high cost loop support on a going-forward basis.⁸ As of January 1, 2000, the high cost loop support for the 32 study areas will then be based upon the average cost of all their lines.

The Commission acknowledged that "caps of unlimited duration may hinder petitioners' incentive and ability to extend service to previously unserved areas, as well as to upgrade service to their existing customers."⁹ The Commission also determined that "limiting the petitioners to the high cost loop support estimated in their original petitions, in perpetuity, is not necessary to accomplish the [Commission's] policies . . ." The Commission "concluded that . . . the individual caps placed on the carriers' high cost loop support have served their purpose . . ."¹⁰ The Commission also recognized correctly that lifting the caps on petitioners' high cost support will increase the affected LECs' incentives and ability to extend service to previously unserved

⁷ Cap Removal Order at ¶ 9.

⁸ Cap Removal Order at ¶ 10.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Id.

areas and upgrade their networks.”¹¹

Central Texas’s conditions are effectively identical to those petitioners addressed in the Cap Removal Order. Therefore, removal of Central Texas’s individual USF cap is both warranted by, and consistent with, the Commission’s conclusions and policy enunciated in the Cap Removal Order. Like the petitioners addressed in that order, Central Texas purchased exchange(s) several years ago and, in conjunction with its request for study area waiver, provided a reasonable estimate of the costs to upgrade the subject facilities for the provision of basic telephone service to existing and new customers. Continuing to limit Central Texas to the high cost loop support estimated in its original petition is not necessary to accomplish the Commission’s policies. Further, continued application of the individual cap imposed in April of 1996 will hinder Central Texas’s incentive to continue to invest in advanced services networks, to upgrade existing service, and to maintain reasonably comparable rates for modern services.

III. Conclusion

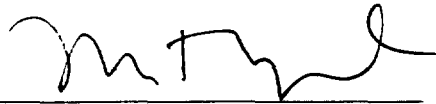
Consistent with the Commission’s policy established in its Cap Removal Order, Central Texas requests that the individual USF cap established by the Commission’s Order be removed as of January 1, 2000. The Central Texas study area’s 2000 USF receipts, based on data forwarded from USAC to the Commission on October 1, 1999, would be \$2,850,998.95. Accordingly, Central Texas requests that the Commission lift the individual cap placed on its high cost loop support on a going-forward basis so that, as of January 1, 2000, Central Texas’s

¹¹ Cap Removal Order at ¶ 10. See also Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service: Promoting Development and Subscriberhip in Unserved Areas, Including Tribal and Insular Areas, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, CC Docket No. 96-45, FCC 99-204 (rel. Sept. 3, 1999).

high cost loop support payments will be based upon the average cost of all its lines. Adequate USF funding is necessary to allow Central Texas to continue to maintain and upgrade its facilities for the provision of universal service to its rural Texas study area. Expedited grant of this request will serve the public interest by ensuring that Central Texas receives adequate universal service funding to recover the costs of its investment and thereby meet its current and future service requirements.

Respectfully submitted,

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October 12, 1999

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Shelley Davis, of Kraskin, Lesse & Cosson, LLP, 2120 L Street, NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20037, hereby certify that a copy of the foregoing "Request for Removal of Waiver Condition Consistent with Commission Policy" of Central Texas Telephone Cooperative, Inc., was served on this 12th day of October, 1999 by hand delivery to the following parties:



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